

Open Letter to Church Board

Date: October 16, 2013

To: Church Board: Sara Simons, Chairman
Don Whitley, Secretary
Barb Scantlin, Elder Chair
Katie Spencer, V. Chair
Dorene Drake, Treasurer
Pat Whitley, Deacons
Oaks Christian Church
1216 Bethlehem St
Houston, Texas 77018-1918

From: Charlie Dean, church member

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The demographic hole in our membership developed over fifteen or twenty years. It did not happen in a vacuum. It is a multi-faceted problem and it is complex. It is however disingenuous to blame it on anything other than OCC. Young Adults simply choose not to be here. Granted, those on the 2013 Board are not responsible for all past Board decisions.

At the time our Bylaws were written (May 13, 2008) nobody at OCC could have envisioned the Information Technology (*the branch of engineering that deals with the use of computers and telecommunications to retrieve and store and transmit information*) that we have today. We need to keep in mind that Information Technology is going to continue and evolve, no matter what we do. As a relatively new member, I have not experienced the history of Oaks Christian Church. I have tried to be observant.

This church has **two major problems (money and membership)**. The Board has not been willing to address causation. The **two main causes** of the church's problems are:

1. first, its **failure to adequately address and resolve the music problem**, and
2. second, its **failure to adequately use Information Technology**.

Unless there is a significant change, this church will either be forced to close or it will barely exist. I commend the Board for creating a Music Program committee (November 15, 2013) to address the music dilemma.

I am promoting **seven concepts** that have almost certainly not been tried at OCC. The purpose of each of these concepts is to target Young Adults (19 – 30).

[1] The first concept is an auxiliary group that I will call the **Library Express**. Members of the *auxiliary group* will handle, oversee, or help with website matters, digitization projects, digital library, newsletters, research, and an assortment of matters, all with emphasis on targeting Young Adults. The Library Express will have an expanding scope to take on projects that the Board does not have time for. The Library Express will set out its own Constitution, Bylaws, plan and procedure. It will select its own leaders and develop its individual programs.

The Library Express will exist per **OCC Bylaws, Article VII: Auxiliary Organizations**. (A) The purpose and responsibility of the Library Express shall be outlined in its own Constitution, by-laws or plan or procedure, which the members will create. (B) The Library Express shall cooperate with the ministry teams of the Church, not only in planning and administering the total program of the Church, but also in developing their individual programs in the best interests of the total program. (C) The Library Express shall be responsible for selecting its own leaders and advising the church office with leaders' names and other contact information.

The Library Express will be an Auxiliary Group per **OCC Bylaws, Article V. Ministry Teams**. (A) The Library Express shall organize itself to implement its ministry. (B) The Library Express shall meet regularly and plan its general program and special events in cooperation with other Ministry Teams, Auxiliary Groups, and the Ministers. (C) The Library Express shall file written reports shall be filed with the Secretary at the General Board meetings.

The Library Express will (or any of its members may) submit to the Church Board bi-yearly business plans. The Library Express may (or any of its members may) submit a report at a business meeting.

The Constitution does not mention Auxiliary Groups. The Bylaws mentions the phrase “Auxiliary Groups” once under ARTICLE V. MINISTRY TEAMS, and the phrase “Auxiliary Organizations” once under ARTICLE VIII: AUXILIARY ORGANIZATIONS.

An auxiliary group or organization is not a special committee for purposes of ARTICLE VII: SPECIAL COMMITTEES AND APPOINTMENTS.

There is no authority for the Board to create or regulate an auxiliary group or an auxiliary organization. It may not conveniently grant itself such authority and then use this as a subterfuge to enlarge its power or diminish the power of the congregation or any member of the congregation.

[2] The second concept is a Digital Library. The digital library involves only nonexempt material. A lot of material would likely be quite boring, however making it available eliminates the inference that we are hiding something. Some of this is already online on a practice site.

[3] The third concept is the One-Two Punch. This concept encourages and supports activities that achieve a two-fold purpose of benefitting or enhancing OCC **while at the same time** benefiting the community.

[4] The fourth concept is a church Website that is actually useful and reliable.

[5] The fifth concept is targeting young adults (19 – 30) with personas. A persona is a tool that is used to test User Experiences. A persona is an archetypical user of a system, and an example of a person who would interact with a system. In our case, OCC is the system. A persona stands in for a real user.

The **sixth concept** is a **Virtual Sunday School Class** of 25 Young Adults. This concept presumes a virtual Sunday school class of 25 young adults between 19 and 30 years of age who are all computer literate. We will virtually serve this group. Eventually, within ____ years, this will be a real group.

The **seventh concept** is **Best Practices**. This concept will concentrate on developing and setting out Best Practices. A Best Practice is sometimes known as a *Standard Operating Procedure*. A Best Practice describes a set of defined methods, processes, systems or practices used by a company or organization to meet performance and efficiency standards within an industry or organization. This will require people, of similar interests or concerns, to cooperate and develop Best Practices. There is no sense in repeating the same mistakes for years on end.

I will provide more information later. Thank you for this opportunity.

The Board's Recent Censorship Initiative

In the minutes of the September 15, 2013 business meeting, the Board states that it does not want some of its old records published. I have made it clear that I am only interested in publishing nonexempt documents. As a professional librarian, I favor disclosure absent strong reason for confidentiality.

Nonexempt documents are not confidential. The Board has no authority to censor its nonexempt documents in any manner. **The Board's censorship initiative is an embarrassment.**

OCC's electronic material is held in digital cameras, scanners, or other equipment that the church members have paid for. It is not reasonable for an officer or leader to store OCC's electronic material on his own personal equipment and **fail to give a copy to the church office**. Digital documents are made by typing on a computer keyboard, or with scanners, or other equipment, and **in the scope of fulfilling one's duties as an officer of the church**. Such electronic material belongs to each church member as much as any other church member. Nobody has a higher degree of ownership than anyone else. There is simply no legitimate reason for censorship of nonexempt church material, in hardcopy form or electronic form.

Being Sneaky About Censorship

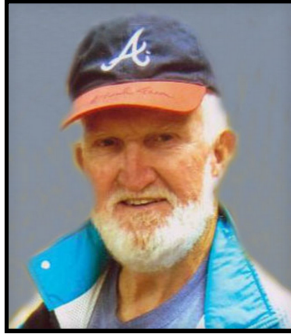
Some officers and leaders insist that we digitize the oldest documents first, before we spend time organizing the more recent documents and making them easily accessible. This creates a problem. It could take months, or years, to complete such a project. Meanwhile, the most recent documents are not reasonably available to the congregation. The 2013, 2012, 2011, etc. documents are more relevant to today's concerns. Some officers and leaders want to delay the collection, organization, and presentation of the recent documents. **This is sneaky and subtle censorship, and wrong.** The congregation deserves better. There is no legitimate reason why the oldest and newest documents cannot be worked on and organized at the same time. This is not rocket science.

The Board fails to provide an explanation, or show any authority, for its censorship initiative of nonexempt material. I looked for an explanation and authority elsewhere. I found no reasonable explanation or authority. However, there is another church in Houston that is also censoring material in a similar way. An editor of **Redneck Houston Gazette** had an interview with a church leader here in Houston. That situation might be instructive in our present predicament. The interview follows.

Please make this letter part of your agenda at the next business meeting.

Redneck Houston Gazette

Recent Interview With Officer Of Church Board



Crusty Crumble
Hardcore Zenith Church



Rusty Alloy
Redneck Houston Gazette

Rusty: Hi, Crusty.

Crusty: Hi there Rusty.

Rusty: Crusty, I hear you leaders at the Hardcore Zenith Church outlawed the publishing of any corporate documents on the Internet.

Crusty: Yep. That's just what we done.

Rusty: Now, some of that stuff was nonexempt. How do you justify that kind of censorship?

Crusty: We have the authority to do that. There's nothing in our constitution or bylaws that prevents it.

Rusty: You mentioned this in the minutes of your last business meeting.

Crusty: We sure did. Making that material hard for the congregation to get will lead to more effective and efficient operations of our church.

Rusty: Really!

Crusty: Yes. Letting everyone see corporate documents might corrupt our church. It might break our grip on the congregation and embarrass some of us officers and leaders. We can't have that.

Rusty: I'm shocked.

Crusty: We've got to maintain a climate of fear and respect.

Rusty: But that chills free speech. And it violates basic human rights. You seem to have no oversight.

Crusty: We don't need no oversight. This tight control is vital to the future of Hardcore.

Rusty: I understand there's a movement in your church to publish nonexempt corporate records and correspondence on the Internet.

Crusty: We're going to nip that in the bud.

Rusty: Why so? Why not just publish it? Why not put it all in a digital library?

Crusty: We've got to maintain our control over the congregation. We've got to remind ever dad-gum member that we run this place. They've got to foller our dictates.

Rusty: The guy wanting to publish the stuff says he's an advocate for the congregation. Do you think he's an advocate?

Crusty: Hey, I can't stand that stuff on my Mexican food. We're in charge. If anybody wants to accomplish anything here, they gotta suck up to us first.

Rusty: I can't believe you're really telling me this. This is ridiculous.

Crusty: We talked about this at the last business meeting. We made a clear decision and that's the long and short of it. I wrote that guy a letter the other day. And I told him how the horse eats the cabbage. He's gonna have to jump through a lot of hoops and over a lot of hurdles before he gets our approval.



**Sucking up tight at Hardcore: Church members at Hardcore
Zenith Church try to navigate an obstacle course of hoops and hurdles.**

Rusty: Crusty, what kind of a budget have yall got?

Crusty: Man, our church members are tighter than bark on a tree. What more can I say.

Rusty: Well, alright. Thank you for our conversation.

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